

Central Coast Bioregion

The Central Coast Bioregion features some of California's most beautiful coastal scenery, blessed with a mild, seasonally moist, and sometimes foggy climate that favors rich farmland and vineyards. This highly agricultural region is famous for artichokes, garlic, and an array of fruits and vegetables. Other industries include wine-making and dairy and cattle ranching. The coast supports a brisk fishing industry, and oil production along the southern end of the bioregion.

Tourist Attractions, Industries

The bioregion extends some 300 miles from just north of Santa Cruz to just south of Santa Barbara, and inland to the floor of the San Joaquin Valley. It encompasses the counties of Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito, Santa Barbara, and portions of Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, Fresno, Merced, Stanislaus, Ventura. The region includes such popular tourist attractions as the Monterey Bay area and Aquarium, Big Sur, the Hearst Castle, and the beaches of Santa Barbara, plus many state parks and other recreational attractions. The region also is the home of such well-known military installations as Fort Ord, Camp Roberts, and Vandenburg Air Force Base.

Climate, Geography

The geography offers coastal mountain ranges including the Santa Lucia and Santa Ynez, and coastal sand dunes. vegetation includes chaparral, mixed hardwood and redwood forests in the bioregion's northern coastal area, and oak woodlands. the Los Padres National Forest covers much of the southern portion of the bioregion. The Salinas and Cuyama rivers feed the bioregion's two major watersheds.

Plants, Wildlife

For a complete list of the Central Coast Bioregion's federal and state endangered, threatened and rare species, please refer to the chart at the end of this bioregional section.

CURRENT CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

Coast Dairies, a large dairy farm, was protected thanks to the cooperative efforts of generous funders. Tens of millions of dollars were combined from several sources in order to acquire this scenic farmland and coastal scenery and preserve it forever. The property will provide recreational benefits for millions of Californian's who come to the region to enjoy California's stunning coastline.

Coast Dairies stretches for seven miles along the rugged coastline of northern Santa Cruz County. Since the turn of the century, the land has been owned by a Swiss family who formed the Coast Dairies and Land Company and operated dairies there until the 1920s. It was the largest privately held property between San Francisco and Santa Cruz and one of the last three such holdings between the Golden Gate Bridge and the Mexican border.

In 1995, a Nevada development company acquired a stock option to purchase the corporation and its only asset – the Coast Dairies property – thus threatening the land with development. Fortunately, Save-the-Redwoods League, propelled by the vision and support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, halted the threat of development by negotiating a purchase of the development company's stock option in the corporation. Save-the-Redwoods League then assigned its right to purchase the option to the Trust for Public Land, which will exercise the option.

Tens of millions of dollars for the combined acquisition of the developers' rights and the landowning corporation are coming from private sources for this acquisition project, including the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, major individual private donors, and Save-the-Redwoods League. The California State Coastal Conservancy added \$1 million in public monies. And thanks to the efforts of key legislators, an additional \$5 million was earmarked in the state budget to leverage the private dollars and complete the funding package.

Through a dynamic management plan, the Trust for Public Land will be seeking input from a variety of sources concerned about the property's future. A plan will be crafted for sound long-term stewardship of the land. Cooperating in the initial design of the management planning process are the Save-the-Redwoods League, the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, The Nature Conservancy, and State Coastal Conservancy. A broad group of federal, state, and local interests, and the public will be invited to participate in the creation of the management plan.

Acquisition of the Coast Dairies provides an opportunity to offer the public a package of multiple benefits. Some of the California coast's most scenic farmland will be protected from the pressures of development. Public access to the beaches will be preserved in perpetuity. Public access to some of the inland areas will be introduced, thus providing diverse recreational options and key linkages to nearby public land. Valuable habitat and views along the seven miles of coastline will also be protected, restored, and enhanced. This is a textbook example of how conservation organizations and government can pursue major acquisitions together.

For more information contact: Reed Holderman, The Trust for Public Land at (415) 495-5660.

*A local land trust has developed an innovative transfer of development rights (TDR) program as part of the **Lodge Hill Restoration Program**. The TDR program is one of only a few such programs in the United States. If successful, the program, may have wide appeal and applicability as a preservation planning tool for growing communities.*

The Lodge Hill Project, located in Cambria, a small vacation community on the southern end of the Big Sur coast, was begun by the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County in order to address proposed development efforts that were threatening coastal open space, native Monterey Pines and ferns, and the unique small-town character.

In order to accomodate growth and the community desire for good planning, the Land

Conservancy implemented an innovative program to transfer development away from proposed locations to areas more appropriate for construction. This program, known as the Transfer of Development Credits (TDC) Program, was created in 1985 by the County of San Luis Obispo, the California Coastal Commission, and the local land conservancy.

The conservancy was initially given a grant from the California Coastal Commission to buy property in the Fern Canyon area. They then sold the development rights, or TDC's, from those lots to interested landowners elsewhere and used the money to purchase more property in the "Priority Area #1" (the priority conservation site).

The county's Land Use Ordinance establishes a range of permitted house sizes, depending on the size of the lot and the slope of the land; it also determines the allowable heights and property setbacks that cannot be exceeded. The ordinance also specifies the size to which a house can be built, beyond the initial limitations, if TDC's are bought. If a property owner wants to expand the size of a house, he/she can work with county planners to decide what the allowable building size is and how many TDC's must be purchased to expand beyond the initial limitations. In the case of this program a "development credit " is equal to one square foot of gross structural area. The owner then approaches the Land Conservancy to purchase the needed credits. Once the TDC's are purchased the planning department releases the building permit. When title on the new lots is recorded and ownership is transferred a conservation easement takes effect.

Today the San Luis Obispo Land Trust owns over 110 parcels consisting of over 200 legal lots in the Fern Canyon area. These lots are beginning to form a continuous greenway around Cambria. The long-term goal is to transfer ownership of this land to an appropriate local agency, or to adjacent landowners, to be preserved in its natural state. This innovative program is being tested in a few areas of the country and will hopefully become an accepted means of addressing open space concerns in local communities.

For more information contact: Land Trust of San Luis Obispo County at (805) 544-9096 or e-mail land-conservancy@slonet.org.

*The **Elkhorn Slough Watershed** is a successful example of how Sustainable Conservation's "Partners in Restoration" (PIR) program has helped to streamline regulatory review, reduce the complexity of compliance, and eliminate penalties and fees for farmers willing to implement conservation techniques on farmlands in coastal watersheds.*

The PIR program was developed as a result of the realization that it can be relatively easy (and often profitable) for farmers to make improvements to their land practices if some of the disincentives such as paperwork, permits, time, etc. are reduced to their bare minimum.

In the Elkhorn Slough watershed, the PIR program has already improved stewardship on private lands by providing farmers with incentives to voluntarily adopt conservation techniques that maximize natural values on their lands, preserve agricultural resources, enhance habitat, and improve water quality. With farmers and environmental regulators focusing on non-regulatory solutions, this model program has already led to conservation and restoration work on 25 local farms. The collective effort of these farms will result in an estimated 10,000 tons of reduced sediment and pesticides that would otherwise have eroded into the Elkhorn Slough and ultimately into the sanctuary, possibly resulting in strict regulatory compliance actions.

The PIR program, created in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Water Quality Protection Program (WQPP) of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, recommends ten conservation practices which are sanctioned in advance by federal, state, and local agencies through watershed-based permits issued to the NRCS. Any farmer involved in the PIR can request technical and cost-share assistance to implement the practices without the need to seek individual project permits.

This project has been supported with funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Environment Now, and others. The program will soon be expanded into the agricultural lands which surround the watersheds of the Salinas River, Watsonville Slough, and south to Morro Bay. The PIR program has been successful in

simultaneously working with farmers and their regulators to focus on non-regulatory solutions to further conservation.

For more information contact: Lynn Dwyer, Sustainable Conservation at (415) 977-0380.

*For coastal communities affected by offshore energy development, the **Coastal Resources Grant Program** allows counties and cities along the California coast to rebuild coastal fisheries, preserve historic and cultural sites, improve eroding beaches and coastal access, restore wetlands and acquire open space in need of protection.*

Through the 1996 enactment in the State Legislature of AB 1431, a portion of excess Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act royalties from existing offshore leases have been made available through the California Resources Agency to coastal cities and counties that are affected by the energy industry for associated resource management efforts.

The annual grants are awarded under two separate programs; Part A (maximum per grant \$500,000) and Part B (\$100,000). Part A grants are intended for the purposes of planning, assessment, mitigation, permitting, monitoring and enforcement, public services and facilities, and for other activities related to offshore energy development. Part B grants are intended for coastal projects in the following categories: habitat protection, protection of life and property, recreation, economic resources, and management improvements.

Projects are aimed at providing protection for flood plains, estuaries, beaches, dunes, fish and wildlife habitat. They also serve to minimize hazards in coastal flood-prone, storm surge, geologic hazard and erosion prone areas, as well as provide public access to the coast for recreational purposes, and acquire scenic viewsheds.

The counties of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura - most directly affected by offshore oil and gas development - have been the major recipients of grants thus far. Indeed, these counties are also the most active grant applicants, submitting numerous high quality proposals. In 1998, approximately \$3.2 million

out of \$3.6 million available went to the Central Coast for projects such as repairing a commercial fishing dock at Morro Bay, acquiring key properties near Pt. Sal and along the Gaviota coast, and updating the Ventura County hazard element. While not all grants go to habitat-related conservation efforts, the Coastal Grant Program is a solid step forward in

supporting both the coastal and ocean ecosystems and overall community economic well-being.

For more information contact: Coastal Resources Grant Program Coordinator, Resources Agency of California at (916) 653-5656.